

Dwightsville, History of
Binghamton
Broome County
New York

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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PART I - HISTORY OF DWIGHTSVILLE

It was claimed as the "finest portion of our fair city". The small locality that sprang into beauty under the generous hand of Col. Walton Dwight that became known as Dwight Place or Dwightsville. Lying on the western bank of the Chenango River, it extended northward from the suspension Bridge (E. Clinton St. Bridge) one-third of a mile, embracing Front Street the whole distance (North-South highway).

In 1850, the 24 acres on which Dwightsville arose was undeveloped with the exception of the north-south highway, the new Erie Railroad tracks and the estate of the Honorable Daniel S. Dickinson.

A majority of the land on the north side of the railroad tracks was the Dickinson farm, also known as the "The Orchard". The estate included the mansion (located between Front Street and the Chenango River), the meadows and gardens to the west of the mansion and a park located between Dickinson and Clinton Street. Dickinson began laying streets, naming them after his family: Lydia after his wife; Mary after his daughter (later changed to Mygatt after her husband); Virginia and Marco after another daughter and his only son; Aubey for a grandson and lastly Winding Way after the outline formed by the creek that ran through the property. Dickinson enjoyed 15 years here with his wife and family until his sudden death in 1866.

A year and a half after Dickinson's death, a colorful would-be humanitarian by the name of Col. Walton Dwight returned to his native Broome County, bearing great dreams and the means to purchase the Dickinson estate. Walton Dwight was born and raised in Windsor, N.Y. and at the age of sixteen moved south into the Williamsport-Allegheny region of Pennsylvania to do lumbering work on land he and his father owned jointly.

When the Civil War broke out, Dwight left the lumbering business to participate in the war effort. He was successful in moving through the ranks to Colonel and he and his regiment were distinguished for their bravery at Gettysburg. Upon getting wounded in 1864, Dwight resigned his commission and returned to Pennsylvania and his lumbering business. Within 4 years he wed and soon left Williamsport for Binghamton; where he and his wife Anna purchased "The Orchard: and moved into the former Dickinson mansion.

Just 2 years after coming to Binghamton, Dwight won the Mayoral race on the Republican ticket. During his term he pushed for uniform and connected city streets, encouraged sewers, sidewalks, street tree plantings and saw through the construction of a new suspension bridge where the East Clinton Street Bridge currently stands.

Late in 1872, after completing his term as mayor, Dwight began building Dwight House, this was the beginning of his suburban housing development. Dwight House measured 210 ft. x 56 ft. and was actually 8 houses in one, connected on the interior only through basement dining rooms. It was built in the Franco-Italian style with a Mansard roof, finished with a costly gilt crest railing. The double front doors of each of the 8 houses were covered with arched portico's, superb carved balconies, and beautiful dormer and bay windows. This huge apartment complex was designed to cater to people of refinement who desired "comforts" included: hot and cold water in every suite of rooms, all rooms were furnished with gas and heat and the furniture was black walnut upholstered in satin, silk and woolen repps. The richest quality linen, silver, china, glass, and furniture were used in the dining rooms.

In 1874 the complex was converted from apartments into a luxurious family hotel, "especially adapted to that class of people who annually leave the cities and spend the summer at a fashionable watering place."

The architect of this unique building was Isaac G. Perry. Perry was a local resident and designed several distinct buildings in Binghamton including: the Inebriate Assylum, the Phelps mansion and the Perry Block. In the early 1880's, Perry became recognized nationally in his profession and renowned as the chief architect for the State Capitol building in Albany.

With the success of the hotel, Dwightville quickly emerged. Dwight feverishly added private dwellings to the development, all of which had the most up to date and most modern conveniences that could be provided. Most of the houses were 2-story "cottages" and had basements, hot and cold running water and gaslights throughout.

The first period of expansion began in 1873, when 22 houses went up along Winding Way. They bore the distinction of a sunburst decoration in the gable, intricately detailed barge-boards and decorations on the porches and windows.

Soon to follow, seven more houses on the south side of the Erie railroad tracks; these houses were built facing the Chenango River and extending to the suspension bridge, they were larger in size and the interior rooms were ornamented with stucco cornices, beautiful centerpieces, black walnut woodwork and hard-finish walls that were tinted in various pleasing shades. Balconies from the first and second floors and bay windows provided tenants or guests with excellent conservatories, that looked out onto the river valley.

Four large fountains adorn the terraced grounds lying between these residences and the river's edge. These fountains and five others were built by Kelly & Gilberts for the Dwightsville area. The fountains measured 11 feet in diameter and were surrounded by gardens and sitting areas.

Across Front Street from these (fountains) were three other houses of other styles. North of the railway were 11 other houses on both sides of Front Street, also of different styles, but all having the same conveniences.

Eventually the number of new houses reached a total of 45. Nearly three million feet of lumber was required, said the Binghamton Daily Times. Two hundred men and many teams were constantly reemployed with monthly payrolls amounting to \$18,000. Nearly 20 miles of water and sewer pipes were laid. The latter empty their contents into the Chenango River.

The architect and builder of Dwights suburban housing development was Truman I. Lacey another local professional. He adopted the Swiss-Gothic style of architecture, which employed the new balloon frame construction method, that allowed the use of thinner, lighter and more numerous members which emphasized the interior structural elements. Most of the houses are characterized by finely carved vergeboards, non-structural bracing (ornamental) on bays, porches and lower floor walls and cross-tie ornaments at the peak of the roof. Lacey was known to be a master of his art, with an unerring eye. His untiring energy and constant watchfulness over the development saved thousands of dollars for the proprietor and built himself an enviable reputation.

The last structures to be built in the Dwightsville area were two apartment houses on Dickinson Street that laid adjacent to Dwight's Hotel. They were constructed between 1888 and 1890 and though the architect is unknown, it is believed that he was influenced by the Franco-Italian style of the Dwight Block. These apartments were built with the intent of being quality housing for the working class. They had hot and cold running water, gas throughout and hot-air furnaces, the same as the smaller cottage type houses in this development had. Each building was a mirror image of the other; both were noted for their two story bay-windows that are place symetrically on each side of the main entrance and unusual gabled roof with chimneys at either end.

These apartments were for rent on a basis of simple interest on their cost, the houses also could be rented in much the same way or purchased at cost. It was the desire of Col. Dwight to beautify his native city rather than to enjoy a pecuniary reward. And beautify, he did, with modern housing affordable to all classes of people and by providing carefully groomed grounds and parks along the Chenango River that may be used for recreation and relaxation to all who may have visited Dwight Place.